

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Shawn Hayden Owens,)	C/A No. 0:24-5074-MGL-PJG
)	
Plaintiff,)	
)	ORDER AND
v.)	REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
)	
James Victor McDade,)	
)	
Defendant.)	
)	

The plaintiff, Shawn Hayden Owens, a self-represented state prisoner, brings this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. This matter is before the court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2) (D.S.C.) for initial review pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915 and § 1915A. Having reviewed the Complaint in accordance with applicable law, the court concludes that it should be summarily dismissed without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.¹

I. Procedural Background

Plaintiff is an inmate at Evans Correctional Institution, part of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (“SCDC”). In a separate action, Plaintiff has brought a civil rights suit against SCDC officials alleging violations of his constitutional rights. See Owens v. Sterling, C/A No. 0:23-5958-MGL-PJG (D.S.C.). Plaintiff now brings this action against the attorney

¹ Plaintiff submitted an Application to Proceed in District Court Without Prepaying Fees or Costs (Form AO240), which the court construes as a motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915. (ECF No. 2.) A review of the motion reveals that Plaintiff should be relieved of the obligation to prepay the full filing fee. Therefore, Plaintiff’s motion for leave to proceed *in forma pauperis* is granted, subject to the court’s right to require a payment if Plaintiff’s financial condition changes, and to tax fees and costs against Plaintiff at the conclusion of this case if the court finds the case to be without merit. See Flint v. Haynes, 651 F.2d 970, 972-74 (4th Cir. 1981).

representing SCDC in that case. Plaintiff alleges Defendant negligently revealed confidential information when replying to an email from a third party thus violating Plaintiff's rights under the First, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution and under the Prison Rape Elimination Act ("PREA"). He seeks monetary damages, as well as injunctive and declaratory relief.

II. Discussion

A. Standard of Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of the Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996), including 28 U.S.C. § 1915 and 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. The Complaint has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit, and is also governed by 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, which requires the court to review a complaint filed by a prisoner that seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. See McLean v. United States, 566 F.3d 391 (4th Cir. 2009). Section 1915A requires, and § 1915 allows, a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

To state a claim upon which relief can be granted, the plaintiff must do more than make mere conclusory statements. See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009); Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). Rather, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is plausible on its face. Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678; Twombly,

550 U.S. at 570. The reviewing court need only accept as true the complaint's factual allegations, not its legal conclusions. Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678; Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555.

This court is required to liberally construe *pro se* complaints, which are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007); King v. Rubenstein, 825 F.3d 206, 214 (4th Cir. 2016). Nonetheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim cognizable in a federal district court. See Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990); see also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 684 (2009) (outlining pleading requirements under Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for "all civil actions").

B. Analysis

The Complaint is filed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which " 'is not itself a source of substantive rights,' but merely provides 'a method for vindicating federal rights elsewhere conferred.' " Albright v. Oliver, 510 U.S. 266, 271 (1994) (quoting Baker v. McCollan, 443 U.S. 137, 144 n.3 (1979)). To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege: (1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). "To constitute state action, 'the deprivation must be caused by the exercise of some right or privilege created by the State . . . or by a person for whom the State is responsible,' and 'the party charged with the deprivation must be a person who may fairly be said to be a state actor.'" West, 487 U.S. at 49 (quoting Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co., Inc., 457 U.S. 922, 936 n.18 (1982)); see also Goldstein v. Chestnut Ridge Volunteer Fire Co., 218 F.3d 337, 343 (4th Cir. 2000) (stating that whether the defendants are state actors depends on, among other factors, whether the injury caused is aggravated in a unique way by the incidents of governmental authority, the extent and

nature of public assistance and public benefits accorded the private actor, the extent and nature of governmental regulation over the actor, and whether the state itself regards the actor as a state actor).

Plaintiff alleges violations of his rights under the First, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution and thus satisfies the first requirement. However, Plaintiff fails to state a claim under § 1983 because Defendant, a private attorney, is not a state actor. See Polk Cnty. v. Dodson, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981) (a private attorney, even if appointed and paid by the state, is not acting under color of state law when performing his function as counsel).

Plaintiff's allegations under the PREA must also fail because there is no private right of action under the PREA and "no basis in law for a private cause of action under § 1983 to enforce a PREA violation." Chapman v. Willis, No. 7:12-389, 2013 WL 2322947, at *4 (W.D. Va. May 28, 2013).

The federal claims in this action are thus recommended for summary dismissal. To the extent Plaintiff attempts to raise state law claims for negligence, the district court should decline to exercise supplemental jurisdiction over any state law causes of action raised by Plaintiff. See 28 U.S.C. § 1367(c)(3); see also United Mine Workers v. Gibbs, 383 U.S. 715, 726 (1996); Tigrett v. Rector and Visitors of the Univ. of Va., 290 F.3d 620, 626 (4th Cir. 2002) (affirming district court's dismissal of state law claims when no federal claims remained in the case).

Even giving Plaintiff the benefit of every reasonable inference, he fails to state a federal claim as a matter of law and amendment would be futile.

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that the Complaint be dismissed without prejudice and without issuance and service of process.

November 15, 2024
Columbia, South Carolina


Paige J. Gossett
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

*The parties are directed to note the important information in the attached
“Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation.”*

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); see Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Robin L. Blume, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).